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Heather S. Miller

SUNY Albany, hm766@cnsvox.albany.edu

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# A Librarian Among Sphagnologists

by Heather S. Miller (SUNY Albany) <hm766@cnsvox.albany.edu>

Sweden and Norway have just experienced the hottest, driest summer ever recorded. The thermometer rose to near 90 degrees Fahrenheit in Orlandet, on the mid coast of Norway, where summer is cool and wet and the mean July temperature is about 57 degrees Fahrenheit. The North Sea was a still pool for two weeks at a time, cereal crops were harvested a good month earlier than usual, and in mid-August there was nary a biting insect to be found. In the midst of this peculiar summer, a group of scholars and would-be scholars from around the world gathered to study species in a genus of moss, *Sphagnum*, that thrives in cool, wet conditions.

In a less tolerant land, this mixed age, mixed gender and mixed nationality hodgepodge of humans dressed in an unfashionable mélange of field pants and shorts, sandals and boots, tank tops and shirts, carrying bags, vials, packets and magnifying lenses, leaping off a very high class German-made coach to fan out over the landscape, peering at the ground would have raised eyebrows, if not worse. But here in Scandinavia, nobody noticed. Even the driver admitted that this was not the strangest group he had ever ferried around the countryside.

What were these people doing? This group of roughly 40 people were on a mega field trip, traveling by coach from **Uppsala, Sweden**, through Sweden and Norway, organized by academics at **Uppsala University** and the **Norwegian University of Science and Technology**, visiting sites where participants could see first hand both many species of *Sphagnum* and the different habitats in which they thrive in different climatic zones in the two countries. This is indeed the sphagnum of horticulture, the peat that has been used for fuel in northern places for centuries, the cutting of which has sometimes revealed remarkable artifacts of the past including human corpses known as bog bodies. (See **P.V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron Age Man Preserved***.) The soft, dried shreds that are used horticulturally bear little resemblance to living sphagnum. Live plants are remarkably beautiful, especially when seen under magnification, and species are found in varying shades of greens and reds and brownish tones, from one to many inches in length, forming mats or floating in pools, the plants sometimes forming star shaped tips. It is the accumulation of dead plants that forms peat. *Sphagnum* coal has even been discovered in China. *Sphagnum* has a great many other uses in the hands of scientists.

The final destination, **Trondheim, Norway**, was the site of a two day symposium following the field trip. At every stop, specimens accumulated in packets and bags to be studied later.

The coach, pristine at the outset, began to accumulate dirt and debris. Various sorts of bags, growing fat with packages of plants, occasionally liberated themselves from the overhead racks and plopped onto the aisle. The nuances of habitats and plant communities were noted. Photographs were taken. Differences between this locale and that were pointed out. The fine differentiations between species of *Sphagnum* were explained and sometimes argued.

All were in this together, the experienced professor and the aspiring student. There were some rebels in the group whose interests extended beyond *Sphagnum* to other plants, especially other mosses and liverworts, inhabiting the field trip sites. They tended to wander off seeking small plants of little interest to their colleagues. The unrelenting sun produced the "Sphagnologist's tan" on the legs of those who wore shorts and boots — tan middle legs between the bottom of the former and the top of the latter. Hats and sunglasses were *de rigueur*; insect repellent was not — mosquitoes had dried up along with their habitats.

The orderly Scandinavians had thought of every detail and kept the group very much on schedule. Each person was issued a hard plastic drinking cup to use for the duration. Lunch was provided each day, served up from the bowels of the bus. When breaks were needed, coffee and tea were served in mid-bog, sometimes with accompanying pastries. The newest graduate students were elected to cart such amenities to and fro. At day's end, indefatigable, most eagerly attend evening lectures on, you guessed it, *Sphagnum*.

Why were they doing it? They share an interest in *Sphagnum*, but not necessarily the same interest and their different viewpoints added, not dissension, but a way to learn and ignite ideas in each other. For some, the passion is distinguishing one *Sphagnum* species from another (not always easily done) and discerning the evolutionary history of those species. For others, it is the unique habitats occupied by *Sphagnum* that matters. By understanding the biological development of *Sphagnum*, one may gain a better understanding of how species are created in general. Peatlands themselves may be important contributors to climate change. As they degrade, they release carbon dioxide.

Peat deposits are studied as windows on past climates. By identifying species, including species of *Sphagnum*, present at given times in the past and knowing their essential habitats today, it is possible to envision not just the climate but also the landscape in place at the time.

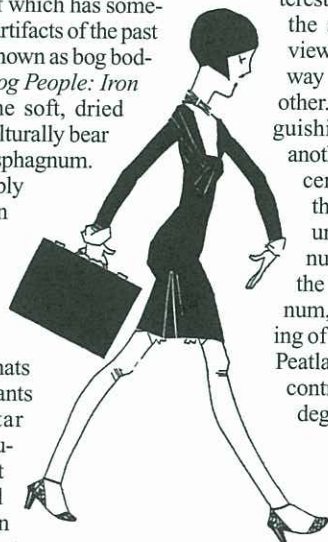
Ultimately this is about scholarship — teaching and learning and figuring out what this

planet is all about and about communication which went on incessantly. And about publishing and finding information. Despite diverse nationalities (including Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Spain, The Netherlands, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, England, Scotland, Canada, Japan, Argentina, and the U.S.) verbal communication was virtually non-stop — in the field, on the bus, at meals — and in English. Topics ranged from why Americans mispronounce Latin to *Sphagnum* speciation, to the big scientific publishers. (Well, yes, we did diverge a bit from academic subjects to find ourselves explaining the U.S. form of government and discussing **George W. Bush's IQ**.)

Somewhat to my surprise, there was understanding of the profit made by big publishers from scholars' work and an interest in breaking out of that mode. The publications accompanying the field trip and its grand finale, the Third International Symposium on the Biology of *Sphagnum*, made very clear that fine publications are possible outside of commercial channels. Each participant received a handy list of locality data and lists of *Sphagnum* species for each field trip site. Three other publications, an "excursion guide" containing detailed information on each locality complete with maps, colored illustrations and reprints of relevant papers; the schedule and abstracts for the symposium; and a 200 page book, *The Norwegian Sphagna: A Field Colour Guide*, all published in the Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet Vitenskapsmuseet, Rapport botanisk series, were also given to participants. These publications of the **Museum of Natural History and Archaeology of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology** were issued on good paper with images printed in color on the covers. The excursion guide was in a format particularly well suited to its purpose: a sturdy ring binder with reprints placed in plastic sleeves and pockets in the front and back covers to hold additional material. Easily laid flat for reading or writing, pages easily removed and placed in a plastic sleeve for actual use in the field with detailed, pertinent information and citations, this could hardly be improved upon. What commercial publisher would take on such a project, unusual in format and limited to 100 copies? The **Guide to Norwegian Species of Sphagnum** includes 54 spectacular color plates of *Sphagnum* plants, much enlarged. Scholars prepared these publications and an academic museum published them, and the world is richer for it. Admittedly, these differ from the usual refereed article in a journal that is used to gain tenure, but they are examples of what academic publishing can and should do — issue high quality publications that advance knowledge regardless of limited markets for them. The model has extended to journals and certainly can continue to do so.

Also available was another memorable pub-

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## Angi Herold Faiks



Electronic Resources Librarian  
MINITEX

University of Minnesota  
15 Andersen Library  
222 21st Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0439

Direct Line: 612-624-2925

Office: 612-624-4002

Toll Free: 800-462-5348

Fax: 612-624-4508

<http://www.minitex.umn>

<http://www.minitex.umn.edu/>

**Name:** Angi Herold Faiks

**Born & lived:** Born in Kalamazoo, MI. Raised in Greenville, MI. Undergrad education at **University of Michigan**, Ann Arbor. Spent a year abroad in Aix-en-Provence, France — studying French. Lived in Chicago for 5 years. Moved to Urbana-Champaign, IL for library school. My first post-degree job was at **Cornell University** in Ithaca, NY. Recently moved to the Twin Cities to work as an e-resources librarian at the **MINITEX Library Network**.

**Education:** 1997 M.S., School of Library and Information Science, **University of Illinois** Urbana-Champaign, IL.

1990 Year abroad, Faculte des Lettres  
D'Aix-en-Provence, Aix-en-Provence, France.

1990 B.A., French & Philosophy, Double major,  
**University of Michigan**, Ann Arbor, MI.

**First job:** (First library job) Reference Librarian, Mann Library, **Cornell University**. Mann is the Life, Biological & Agricultural library at **Cornell**.

**Professional career and activities:** See attached CV.

**In my spare time I like to:** Run, run races (slowly) to raise money for charity, do yoga, cook, read, eat all different kinds of food.

**Favorite books:** All Anne Lamott, Michael Chabon books, *Me Talk Pretty One Day* — Sedaris, *Middlemarch* — Elliot, *Sophie's Choice* — Styron, *A Suitable Boy* — Seth and on and on....

**Pet peeves/what makes me mad:** Overall lack of concern for our environment. People who are vehemently opposed to change.

**Philosophy:** Keep getting up. Be nice.

**Most meaningful career achievement:** It is probably the book chapter that I wrote with my previous director, in a yet-to-be-published book.

**Goal I hope to achieve five years from now:** I would like to move into a management position where I can more effectively help shape and nurture an organization and its people.

**How/Where do I see the industry in five years:** I think we will continue to see the exciting development of our library systems. As the new generation of library systems are becoming more robust, I believe that the next phase will be to try to make these systems work better for us and our patrons — heading towards the ease of **Google** with a library touch. I also am excited to watch the work force change as many retire. I think the new round of library managers will bring a new approach to the workplace, making libraries even more vibrant for staff and patrons. And, I think eBooks will make their mark. ☺

## A Librarian Among Sphagnologists from page 42

lication, *The National Atlas of Norway: Vegetation*, by Asbjørn Moen, (ISBN 82-7945-000-9) published by the **Norwegian Mapping Authority**. At 31 cm with extensive text, numerous and varied maps, and magnificent photographs, this book stands out not just visually but also for the depth and range of information provided for a country that encompasses Arctic to mild oceanic climates. Nor is it limited to descriptions of vegetation, focusing as well as on the cultural landscape, biodiversity and conservation. This is another fine product from a non-commercial publisher.

The superbly well-organized physicists were clearly admired for their ability to control much of their own publishing, while biologists sadly lamented their own lack of similar cohesion. Zoologists and botanists tend not to appreciate each other's work and those of either field who study whole organisms are often dismissed by those who focus on the molecular aspects of living things. They, in turn, are found to be limited in their outlook to mechanical science, "cookbook" science, contributing to a diminution of graduate education by substituting classes on computers and methodology for more horizon-expanding courses. There seems to be little to be done about such dichotomies.

Citations were recited over dinner and e-mails flew after the expedition ended with advice on finding obscure publications. Other information was sought, but proved elusive, surprising given the vast flow of information and the number of scholarly databases that make great claims for their powers. One person wanted to know where a photograph that he took had been published. Databases abound with authors and titles, but not photographers. A **Google** search on images turns up photographs, but apparently not those covered by copyright. Another hole in the swiss cheese of information supply? If published photographs are credited, surely they should be indexed.

Not only publishing, but also libraries are never far from my mind. Uppsala is a university town (look at the **Uppsala University** Website at <http://info.uu.se/presengl.nsf/>) and, being an academic librarian, I had to take a look at the **Uppsala University Library**, housed in a massive old building on a hill overlooking the city, proudly bearing the legend *Carolina Rediviva* above its main entrance. *Carolina Rediviva* refers to its predecessor, the oldest university building, *Academia Carolina*, named after **King Charles IX**, demolished in 1778. In the early 1800's the present building was erected and named the "Resurrected Carolina." The library has a venerable look, but it includes a pleasant café, attractive glass display cases and public Internet terminals in the lobby alongside darkened rooms displaying the Codex Argenteus (The Silver Bible), a sixth century manuscript of the four gospels. (Those who attended **IFLA '98** in Amsterdam may have heard **Lars Munkhammar's** paper on this peripatetic manuscript <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla64/050-132e.htm>.) Inside, the library itself is bright and modern, revived yet again, with comfortable seating and shelves filled with centuries of books, and computer terminals at the ready.

Inevitably, libraries came into dinner table conversation. We learned that British students, trained

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to use libraries, are not flocking wholesale to the Web. *Use of the Library* is a for-credit, required course in which students learn the value of various forms of scholarly communication. I can't help but think that the infatuation with the Web that we see among U.S. college students is a direct result of the dumbing down of the whole educational system and the failure of colleges and universities to properly teach the uses and misuses of the multitude of ways in which information is provided. Unfortunately, librarians have been complicit in this.

The **Library of Congress** classification system was roundly criticized, even ridiculed, for its North American biases and penchant for organizing information in ways not relevant to the scholars who use it. But there was love of libraries present and great enthusiasm for the value of browsing shelves, seen as an entirely different exercise than browsing online. Those faced with closed stacks severely felt the loss.

Lest one think that these people were all work and no play, let it be recorded that two

tourist type outings were built into the schedule and an occasional brief stop at a grocery store was allowed so that participants could stock up on whatever they felt was missing from their diet. One outing took us to a Swedish "summer farm" where dairy cattle are taken for summer pasturing. The second was an evening boat trip from Fr̄ya to two nearby islands with a stop at a salmon farm. Here we were among the many islands and skerries off the coast of **Norway**, north beyond the tip of Scotland, beyond the **Faroes**, gazing west where the next landfall is **Iceland**, then **Greenland**, then **Labrador**. It was truly awe-inspiring to think of where we were and what has taken place there in centuries past. Moreover, impromptu sessions of Swedish folk fiddle music erupted on more than one occasion and a midnight beach party was held at which the **Northern Lights**, normally a winter phenomenon, were seen.

High tech information was all around us in what sometimes seemed to be the remotest of places, landscapes sculpted during the last Ice Age, the homeland of the Vikings, the shores of the North Sea where so much history, much of it unhappy, had taken place. Cell phone conversations took place in mid-bog.

Several participants used global positioning systems (GPS) to record the location of their finds. Every public form of transportation that we used — the grand SAS Air Bus, the coach in which we rode from locale to locale, and the hydrofoil ferry that took us from the island of Hitra to its neighbor, Fr̄ya — all had GPS. Monitors displayed maps on which a small moving target represented the vehicle's position. Outside temperature was also displayed inside the plane and the bus. Never had a traveler known so acutely where he was in relation to the planet or what temperature he was experiencing. I thought of the Vikings setting sail from Fr̄ya with only their knowledge of the heavens and currents, a few pieces of equipment for determining location, and accumulated experience to guide them.

Librarians seldom immerse themselves in the work of scholars or accompany field biologists into the field. It is enlightening to do so! The people I was with spend their lives studying Sphagnum (as others spend theirs studying other seemingly esoteric topics) for the same reason that an artist paints — to get at the essence of things. Ultimately they are a testament to the power of scholarly communication — in any format. 🍄



## ATG Special Report: Part III — Libraries In The Cyberage — Electronic Publishing and the Future of Scholarship

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University)  
<herringm@winthrop.edu>

*Please Note: This is part three in a four part series. See **Against the Grain**, Sept. 2002, v.14#4, pp.42-59 for part one. See **Against the Grain**, Nov. 2002, v.14#5, pp.32-59 for part two. — ATG*

Electronic access has shaken (but not entirely dislodged) the roots of library services. For more than a decade, libraries have made materials available electronically. Major vendors have emerged to make access easier and seamless to the user. Libraries, eager to make materials available to users, have quickly and enthusiastically made this access a primary part of their document delivery. Unfortunately, it has given space to a spate of nonsense about how libraries are becoming obsolete, but we'll save that for another discussion.

Electronic access is often costly. With limited budgets, libraries have to make either/or decisions: either make materials available in print, or offer them electronically. Many, if not most, have chosen to deliver the bulk of their serial materials electronically. Because the presentation of subject matter in, for example, the Humanities (often text-base only) made digitization easy and quick, materials in these areas were often chosen first. Although the total number of full-text electronically accessible materials is small, those materials chosen are often frequently consulted.

Only recently, however, has it come to the attention of librarians that almost no vendor is archiving electronically accessible materials for more than five years. Every time a year is added, another, earlier year is dropped. Thus, what scholars and the public were able to access in the early nineties will most likely *not* be available early in the new millennium-and it will not be a "computer" problem but a "management" decision! With the exception of **JSTOR**, no other vendor is offering a full retrospective back file (Volume 1, Number 1) online. Various *individual* titles may be available, but the price is often formidable and, for many libraries, prohibitive. Electronic archive access is generally out of reach for all but the largest of libraries.

Meanwhile, vendors making electronic access to magazines available are also dropping titles annually, and *often without any warning to the libraries under subscription*. Thus, if a given title is not being accessed as frequently as the vendor wishes, it will be replaced by a title that the vendor thinks may be more popular. The library subscribing to this service is generally never made aware the title has been

dropped unless and until a patron using the title inquires of its whereabouts. The electronic access is often so unstable that titles come and go from the database almost as frequently as patrons to library buildings. More recently it now comes to our attention that the nocent effects of the **Tasini** decision are proving true. **Sage** publications has recently yanked its materials from **ProQuest** owing to its inability to continue its profits while paying its freelancers. Other companies will, if they haven't already, follow suit. How will scholars access electronically defunct materials? What are the coming changes for scholars and authors? What will be the impact of eBooks? Or other electronic configurations? If many companies pull their materials, then what? Are we back to print alone?

Three very capable speakers (one did not submit a paper for publication) enlightened us on this matter. **Ron Chepesiuk** stepped to the dais first and delivered an overall discussion of eBooks and libraries. **Mr. Chepesiuk** made the case that librarians may not be as fully ready as they ought to be. He further warns that if librarians believe the eBook revolution will have the same impact on libraries as microforms have, they'd better think again: it will be far greater. **Mr. Chepesiuk** is professor and a librarian at

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